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Held at Headquarters, New York,
on Monday, 8 July 1996, at 3 p.m.

President: Mr. MOUBARAK (Lebanon)
(Vice-President)

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In the absence of Mr. Gervais (Côte d'Ivoire), Mr. Moubarak (Lebanon), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 3.20 p.m.

OPERATIONAL ACTIVITIES OF THE UNITED NATIONS FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION (continued) (A/51/124-E/1996/44; E/1996/43, E/1996/64 and Add.2)

(a) FOLLOW-UP TO POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY (continued)

Mr. DISEKO (South Africa) said that his delegation fully associated itself with the statement made by the Chairman of the Group of 77 and China.

The United Nations system had become actively involved in South Africa, where the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) office alone had a core fund of $15 million for its activities during the current financial year. At the ninth session of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), President Mandela had pledged a contribution of 875,000 rand to UNDP and 100,000 rand to the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). South Africa provided common premises to the United Nations system agencies and covered the rental costs.

His Government was nearing completion of a country strategy note, and cooperation with the resident coordinator system would be entered through, inter alia, monthly reports by the resident coordinator to his Government. There was no doubt that the simplification and harmonization of the rules and procedures of field-level agencies would greatly enhance cooperation, including with non-governmental organizations. The advantages, especially in terms of operational activities in remote, rural and largely illiterate communities, could not be overemphasized. His Government welcomed the continuing consultations between the United Nations system and national Governments and supported many of the Secretary-General's recommendations.

His Government had decided to integrate all the official development assistance it received into its overall budgetary process, thereby enhancing its capacity for approval, monitoring and evaluation of the relevant projects.

His delegation strongly believed that General Assembly resolutions 50/120 and 50/227 formed the basis for further improvements in the operational

activities of the United Nations system, activities which must be carried out for the benefit of developing countries, at their request, and must be funded on a predictable, continuous and assured basis. The persistent insufficiency of resources, especially in the context of the ever-growing needs of recipient countries, was a cause for serious concern. African and least developed countries were most in need of funds and must be given priority in any funding modality. His delegation called for the enhancement of the absorptive capacities of the African and the least developed countries; otherwise, there was a risk of resources being diverted to recipient countries with greater absorptive capacity.

His Government regarded funding for operational activities as one of the building blocks to redress the inequalities inherited from his country's apartheid past and to launch it into an era of sustained and balanced economic growth and development.

Mrs. REBONG (Philippines) said that it was critically important to receive feedback on implementation both from the authorities of the programme countries and from the field offices of the United Nations system, so as to ensure that work did not proceed in a vacuum at the headquarters level. In connection with the Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC) statement and the management process for the implementation of General Assembly resolution 50/120 (E/1996/64, annexes I and II), her delegation stressed the importance of full consultation with national authorities and field representatives, including those of the specialized agencies, as well as the need for delegations at headquarters level to have access to the management process. Attention must be paid to ensuring that the process of revising ACC guidelines did not result in delays in programming and resource allocation which would adversely affect the plans and programmes of developing countries. Her delegation was concerned about the slow progress in the simplification and harmonization of the complex rules and procedures which posed problems for developing countries, particularly those with limited capacity and expertise; immediate attention must be paid to that issue. It would be worth considering the recommendation for greater use of national budgetary and financial systems in that respect.

On the subject of impact evaluation, her delegation stressed the importance of paragraph 5 of General Assembly resolution 50/120. Referring to annex II, section E, of the report of the Secretary-General (E/1996/64), she asked what

was meant by the sentence "Resources and funding issues need to be dealt with at the governmental level". Her Government had always discussed resources and funding issues at the national level. She also asked what was meant by the words "linkages to reforms in governance" in the last line of that section.

Mr. GERUS (Belarus) said that the Council's reform process must be based not only on General Assembly resolution 50/120 but also on General Assembly resolution 50/227. It was especially important to enhance the role of the Council as the central mechanism for coordinating the work of the United Nations system and its specialized agencies and for monitoring the work of subsidiary bodies in the economic and social fields.

Stable and adequate financing was a prerequisite for the success of operational activities, not only to enhance their effectiveness, as advocated in paragraph 5 of General Assembly resolution 50/120, but also to be able to expand the number of recipient countries. The growing needs of developing countries and the special needs of States with economies in transition must be taken into account. The Council must therefore engage in a permanent dialogue with the entire donor community. At the same time, new mechanisms for enhancing the use of existing resources must be found, particularly through a concentration of the efforts of all agencies of the United Nations development system at the local level on the basis of the priorities determined by recipient countries. It was also important to increase coordination at the regional and subregional levels, develop mechanisms to promote the national implementation of regional programmes, and implement paragraph 21 of General Assembly resolution 50/120.

His delegation attached importance to the full implementation of paragraph 30 of General Assembly resolution 50/120. As the experience of UNDP had shown, technical assistance projects provided an opportunity to train national experts and managerial staff to international standards, and in that regard his delegation looked forward to the completion of the common guidelines at the field level for the recruitment, training and remuneration of national project personnel referred to in paragraph 26 of resolution 50/120. The general approach of entrusting national Governments with basic responsibility for coordinating national development strategies with international technical assistance programmes was sound, provided that the resident coordinator system facilitated and supported that work.

The implementation of General Assembly resolution 50/120 would prove impossible without the strengthening of the system of accountability through the establishment of clearer responsibility for programme implementation, enhanced responsibility of programme managers for the effective management of human and financial resources, and effective training of personnel in the management of financial resources.

Mr. LAUZON (United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)) said that UNDP attached the highest priority to the implementation of General Assembly resolution 50/120 and, as Chair of the Joint Consultative Group on Policy (JCGP) for 1996-1997, would seek to ensure that all subgroups of JCGP helped further the implementation of the resolution in their respective areas.

In the area of coordination, the Executive Board of UNDP had allocated 1.7 per cent of the core resources for support to the United Nations system and aid coordination. UNDP had been working to support the implementation of General Assembly resolution 51/120 at the country level, principally through the resident coordinator system. As Special Coordinator for Economic and Social Development, the Administrator had been assisting the Secretary-General in ensuring effective follow-up at the inter-agency level to international conferences in the context of ACC.

Regarding programming matters, he said that UNDP, with its JCGP partners, had made common policy statements and had also prepared guidelines, a training package and a training video. It was contributing to work on common system guidelines on monitoring and evaluation using the programme approach.

In the area of management, personnel and administration, JCGP was aiming at a target of 68 common premises by the end of 1997. UNDP expected the model for common services established in South Africa to serve as a framework for replication in other locations.

The decisions adopted by the UNDP Executive Board in recent years contributed significantly to facilitating the implementation of General Assembly resolution 50/120. The efforts being made within JCGP, the Consultative Committee on Programme and Operational Questions and ACC and at the field level to promote joint programming and common services would help achieve the objectives of the resolution. A significant contribution was being made by the Governments of programme countries to the strengthening of coordination within the United Nations system.

UNDP, along with its partners in UNICEF, the World Food Programme (WFP), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and other agencies and funds, was determined to implement General Assembly resolution 50/120 as speedily as possible. The Council could assist by giving precise indications of the progress expected in the context of the recommendations made in the report of the Secretary-General. In particular, guidance would be welcome with respect to: the programme approach; the strengthening of national capacities; the harmonization and simplification of policies and procedures; common services; joint premises; and cooperation among the various partners in follow-up and evaluation.

Ms. BERGERON (Canada) said that various difficulties remained in implementing the provisions of General Assembly resolution 50/120. Little progress had been made in the past year with regard to further simplification and harmonization of regulations and procedures, and compromises were required from funds and programmes, national Governments and bilateral donors alike. Progress in harmonizing programming cycles was more encouraging, however, with the prospect of more than 90 per cent of countries having harmonized their programming by the following cycle. The budget harmonizations undertaken by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) had been particularly effective, resulting in a common approach that would allow greater transparency of budget format.

Where evaluation was concerned, the proposed plans should be implemented and rigorously monitored. The approach outlined for evaluating the impact of the United Nations system's operational development activities was of especial interest, as such evaluations required databases at the planning stage, progress indicators, adequate time intervals between completion and evaluation, and linkages to the strategic plans of institutions and Governments. In addition, the scope and level of the evaluation must be clearly defined. Moreover, care had to be exercised to ensure the objectivity of mid-term reviews and annual reports.

Performance in the area of common services and premises had been rather poor, with United Nations agencies under the same roof in only 14 per cent of countries. In that regard, the proposals of the Joint Inspection Unit in document A/49/629 merited close attention.

Although much work had been done with regard to country strategy notes (CSNs) over the previous three years, relatively few concrete results had been obtained. Her delegation called upon resident coordinators in the field to continue to promote CSNs as a tool for more effective planning, integration and coordination of field activities.

The positive example of the programme undertaken by the Committee of Co-sponsoring Organizations of the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) should lead to other initiatives to strengthen field coordination, although the role of resident coordinators apparently required further study and clarification.

Mr. ALOM (Bangladesh) said that, while his delegation was encouraged that the basis for implementing General Assembly resolution 50/120 appeared more solid than that in the case of the predecessor resolution, comprehensive statistical data on operational activities reflected a frustratingly marginal increase in the resources being made available for development.

For effective national execution, national capacity needed to be enhanced. The system of accountability should be broadened, simplified and brought into line with the national system. Projects should make maximum use of local institutions, services and expertise, and authority should be delegated to the field level where possible. Governments should retain access to, as well as provide as necessary, guidance on programmes and funds. The programme approach should be implemented with a flexibility that reflected the diversity of countries' development needs.

If desired, country strategy notes (CSNs) should be prepared by the respective countries with the full participation and leadership of their Governments; the resident coordinator's office should only facilitate the process, without imposing conditions for the development of the cooperative framework. The CSNs should be a complementary tool for the overall programming and implementation of development activities undertaken by Governments, with or without the assistance of development partners.

Given the country-specific priorities of programme administration and execution and the differing mandates of United Nations programmes, attempts at harmonization would be impractical in the absence of an integrated cooperation framework for the entire United Nations system. Harmonization of programming cycles at the initiative of the national authority appeared to be a more

feasible goal. The United Nations system should limit its harmonization efforts to issues of broad and common concern. Moreover, a common spirit of sharing and caring among the organizations of the United Nations system would be more conducive to effective programme coordination and implementation than would common premises and services in and of themselves.

Finally, he emphasized the importance of full participation by the national authority in programme monitoring and evaluation and the need for a formal framework to facilitate consultation among Member States and the organizations of the United Nations system.

Mr. SOEPRAPTO (Indonesia) said that the simplification and harmonization of rules and procedures continued to be hampered by the sheer number of funds and programmes involved; the varying circumstances and stages of development of recipient countries compounded the problem. In initiating general harmonization guidelines to meet those constraints, the United Nations system should take full account of the priorities expressed in the strategy notes of those countries electing to use them. Overall management requirements should be simplified so as not to divert the focus of national institutions from more essential matters.

His delegation was pleased to note the progress already made towards achieving the goal of a more coordinated country presence, including common premises, and commended efforts to provide guidelines on operating a common services account. It also called for the strengthening of national capacities, with a view to improved programme monitoring and evaluation at the field level, and for full account of field-level feedback to be taken in the Headquarters-level strategic plan.

Ms. KRISHNA (India) stressed the need to preserve the specificity of individual funds and programmes and their supporting constituencies. Greater coordination between various parts of the United Nations system should not come at the cost of the neutrality of United Nations development assistance, nor should it entail the imposition of conditionalities.

She stressed the need to evolve concrete measures to ensure adequate funding for operational activities and to provide countries with diverse resource options. Overall aid coordination should be undertaken by Governments alone, while programme impact evaluations should be conducted in the overall context of long-term poverty eradication goals. The country strategy note

should be an optional tool, not a requirement for formulating general policy guidelines.

Mr. PRENDERGAST (Jamaica) said that while the resident coordinator system would be the essential agent of change in the management process, collaboration with Governments would be a crucial element to ensure the success of that process. Monitoring and feedback mechanisms and operational guidelines should be developed through a collaborative effort.

His delegation would like to learn more about the specific areas of difficulty that had been encountered thus far in the process of simplification and harmonization. The sharing of common premises should be pursued, except in specific cases where premises could not meet all operational requirements. The long-term effectiveness of programmes depended on predictable, continuous and assured funding. New and innovative ideas for generating funds should be viewed as an addition to, not a replacement for, existing funding and resource-allocation mechanisms.

Mr. BETI (Observer for Switzerland) said that, while harmonization of programme cycles had been accomplished in many countries, a common methodology for assessment, project description and reporting and similar monitoring and evaluation systems had proved more difficult to develop. His delegation proposed that the Council should request that the United Nations funds and programmes intensify their harmonization efforts and report to it in 1997 on the progress accomplished. It hoped that the system-wide application of the programme approach would result in an increased number of jointly financed operations and better outputs.

While his delegation agreed that the Secretariat would need additional resources in order to carry out the work outlined in resolution 50/120, it suggested that the Secretariat should convene an informal meeting to discuss in detail the priorities, content and timing of the different reviews, as well as actual funding requirements. It hoped that some of the resources could be mobilized within the United Nations system as in the past.

Mr. ACUÑA (Costa Rica), speaking on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, said that the operational activities of the United Nations development system should not be allowed to usurp the monitoring and aid-coordination functions of Governments. Although the Group of 77 and China supported the concept of shared premises and facilities, it reiterated the need to preserve

the specificity of individual funds and programmes and their supporting constituencies. Moreover, the United Nations system should maintain its neutral character and should not resort to conditionalities.

Governments that did not resort to country strategy notes should be allowed to use their own programmes and plans as development frameworks, and downstream project implementation should not be ignored in favour of the programme approach. Moreover, it was important not to lose sight of the international enabling environment, especially with regard to the problems of resources and technology transfers.

Mr. KYUN (Observer for the Republic of Korea) endorsed the statement made by the preceding speaker and said that the key question was whether resolution 50/120 could be fully implemented. He believed that national execution would be further facilitated by the simplification of the rules and procedures governing programme management and reporting requirements which, if too diverse, constituted a serious obstacle to effective collaboration and evaluation. Undue government effort was spent trying to fathom complex requirements and procedures, creating an additional burden, especially for countries involved in reconstruction and rehabilitation. In that regard, his delegation urged the Consultative Committee on Programme and Operational Questions (CCPOQ) and the Joint Consultative Group on Policy (JCGP) to endeavour to complete the task of information gathering and assessment and the field testing by the end of the current year.

United Nations organizations at the country level should ensure that periodic programme reviews and evaluations were conducted in a timely and coordinated manner. His delegation therefore endorsed the holding of joint evaluations by various organizations on specific themes. The United nations system should promote the development of national evaluation capacities. Common guidelines for monitoring and evaluation programmes and mechanisms for collecting the baseline and performance data were also essential.

Closer cooperation at headquarters was vital to achieving a new spirit of partnership within the United Nations system. His delegation commended the recent decision of the Secretary-General to designate the Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme as the Special Coordinator for Economic and Social Development. At the field level, a more integrated approach within the framework of national policies should be developed under the leadership of the

resident coordinator. His delegation welcomed the increased number of single United Nations system premises as a development which improved efficiency and coordination.

The ultimate objective of all improvements to operational activities was to enhance national capacity-building. As a small but important step in that direction, his delegation proposed that the number of national experts and the proportion of indigenous technology used in operational activities should be increased.

Mr. HAEMMERLI (Division for Policy Coordination and Sustainable Development (DPCSD)), replying to a question put by the representative of Ireland, on behalf of the European Union, said that the demands of translating legislation into operational guidelines had to be balanced against the need for flexibility at the field level. When approaching the problem of rules and procedures, it was necessary to take related costs for recipient countries into account. In the past, heavy emphasis had been placed on detailed operational guidelines, often devised at headquarters with insufficient consultation of field and national personnel. The new approach was to first decide which measures had been successful, and then to offer a broad array of options from which the most appropriate could be chosen by those in the field. Depending on resources, it was hoped that national officials, United Nations system personnel and members of diplomatic missions would be consulted with a view to avoiding some of the problems of the past.

The programme approach was merely a tool designed to facilitate the management of external resources by national authorities, which should be fully conversant with the guidelines in order to ensure that its country's particular requirements were met. Training programmes and workshops offered to national officials should be improved to enhance common understanding. Some organizations had a lengthy experience with the programme approach, while others had only recently begun to use that approach. At the United Nations system level, DPCSD had reported to the Economic and Social Council in 1993 and 1994 on actions taken by the Consultative Committee on Programme and Operational Questions (CCPOQ) and on some common principles relating to the programme approach. In keeping with resolution 50/120, DPCSD would review the common-system definitions of the programme approach and how to translate them at the country level. Finally, with regard to the use of Joint Inspection Unit (JIU)

outputs, JIU reports were carefully reviewed by individual organizations, ACC and CCPOQ. Reports and observations regarding actions undertaken were also submitted to the General Assembly and considered by the Fifth Committee. The Joint Inspection Unit had devoted much of its time to operational activities and provided many recommendations to various organizations.

Replying to the representative of the Philippines, he said that it would have been more accurate to refer to "governmental and intergovernmental levels" in the second sentence of annex II, section E, of document E/1996/64. In the last line of the same section, reference should have been made to reforms in the three interrelated areas of governance, resource negotiation and increased efficiency and effectiveness of all operational activities, instead of merely to reforms in governance.

The meeting rose at 5.05 p.m.